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The European Journal of Ageing at the start of a new decade

Dorly J. H. Deeg · Hans-Werner Wahl

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The European Journal of Ageing enters the new decade with its seventh volume. By now, the Journal has built up a substantial readership, a wide network of reviewers, and receives a growing stream of submissions from many countries in Europe as well as from many other parts of the world. We as editors are grateful for the active efforts of all contributors. The year 2010 also marks an important event: the Journal will receive an impact factor from Thomson ISI. This first impact factor is calculated for the year 2009, and will be based on citations in 2009 to Journal articles from 2007 to 2008. It is expected to be published by June, 2010. Please watch the Springer website for its release. No doubt, the publication of an impact factor will contribute to the viability of the Journal.

Now we have put six years past us, it is time to take stock of the Journal's development. Did the Journal live up to its mission statement to 'understand ageing in Europe and the world over'? In other words, from which countries exactly are published articles originating? And to what extent do published articles reflect collaboration between countries? A further part of the mission statement is 'to publish original articles on the social, behavioural and health-related aspects of ageing and encourage an integrated approach between these aspects.' This leads to questions such as: To what extent were published articles

interdisciplinary in content? Can a development be seen towards more interdisciplinarity?

The editors have addressed these questions by building a dataset of all published articles through 2009. In this period, 159 articles were published, including editorials and reports. When the six editorials by the editors-in-chief are disregarded, this makes 153 publications. Excluding other editorials and reports, the article count is 146.

Let us first address the origins of the published articles. In Table 1, it can be observed that the first volume was strictly European—which does seem proper for the opening issue of a European journal. This volume in fact consisted of one special issue, with all contributions invited by the editors. However, through the following years, the percentage of contributions from other parts of the world increased, with a maximum of 26% in volume 5. The bottom row of Table 1 shows the percentage of contributions that were co-authored by scholars from countries different from the first author's. Volume 1 scores highest with 67% cross-national contributions, corresponding to the theme of this special issue: 'Cross-European research'. It is good to see that in the subsequent volumes, the percentage of cross-national collaborative articles increased to 31 in volume 6. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the majority of publications stem from Northern and Western Europe. Specific countries that contributed most were Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom with around 20 articles each. From other parts of the world, Hong Kong and Lebanon are worth mentioning as contributors. Two parts of the world that are missing in this list are Eastern Europe and Latin America, although especially Eastern European scholars did co-author some contributions.

Turning to the disciplinary content of the contributions, Table 2 shows the number of disciplines, broadly defined as 'social', 'behavioural', and 'health', addressed in

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Table 1 Country of first author (%) from volume 1 (2004) to volume 6 (2009)

	Volume (%)						Total N*
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
NW Europe	92	88	86	73	71	77	122
S Europe	8	3	–	8	3	10	8
Austr + NewZ	–	–	–	–	10	–	3
N America	–	6	–	8	13	3	9
Near East	–	3	14	8	3	7	9
Asia	–	–	–	3	–	3	2
Total N	13	32	21	26	31	30	153
>1 countries (%)	67	16	19	15	27	31	

* Editorials by editors-in-chief excluded

Table 2 Interdisciplinary content (%) from volume 1 (2004) to volume 6 (2009)

	Volume (%)						Total % (N)*
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
One discipline			52	50	47	40	44 (64)
Two disciplines	–	42	28	42	37	41	36 (53)
All three disciplines	45	19	10	4	13	21	16 (23)
Methodology	22	–	10	4	3	–	4 (6)
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100 (146)

* Editorials and reports excluded

published articles. These counts are limited to the original investigations and the reviews, while the editorials and reports are disregarded. Again, volume 1 stands out with the highest percentage of articles addressing all three disciplines, corresponding with its intended profile. In the subsequent volumes, there is considerable fluctuation in content, which seems a normal pattern for a journal that publishes a modest 30 articles yearly. Nevertheless, it is good to see that in total (last column), just over half (52%) of the contributions are based on at least two disciplines. A further observation from Table 2 is that methodological articles are scarce.

Other bits of information can be derived from the article data, such as the facts that EJA published 11 reviews that from the 125 original investigations 3 had a qualitative approach and 3 used mixed methods, and that we had 10 contributions in the section ‘Critical positions in ageing research’. Furthermore, 95 (66%) of the research articles were submitted on the initiative of the author as opposed to recruited by the editors (e.g. for special sections). Finally, nine guest editors were responsible for articles published in special sections.

In all, these data provide a profile of the European Journal of Ageing as distinct from other journals. First, it is

concentrated on Europe but not exclusively so. Second, it is a forum for a growing number of cross-national collaborative publications. Third, it publishes preferably interdisciplinary research—according to some scholars, the only type of research that leads to proper insight into ageing.

The data also show some areas where we could direct more efforts. In the first place, it would be good to encourage submissions of articles with first authors from other parts of the world than Northern and Western Europe, in particular Eastern European articles. As a second point, it also seems good to encourage more submissions using qualitative approaches—exclusively or in combination with quantitative approaches. As a third point, only a small minority of the articles published addressed methodological issues.

Elaborating on the latter point, the editors are convinced that research on ageing is still developing further and should be accompanied by methodological advances. We feel that here special encouragement is needed. Therefore, from this seventh volume we launch, as a twin sister to our section on ‘Critical positions in ageing research’, a new section on ‘Methodological issues in ageing research’. This section will provide an option for authors to communicate methodological problems, challenges, solutions, or directions to go that are important to research on ageing, and to cross-European research on ageing in particular. Specific topics may include challenges related to translation doing quantitative or qualitative research, cross-country sampling strategies, rigorous cross-country comparisons using both good theory and good statistics, and measurement instrument development. The format of such articles may deviate from the standard Introduction–Methods–Results–Discussion structure. Perhaps needless to state, contributions submitted for this section will undergo regular review. With this section, EJA aims to further profile itself as a journal that supports the badly needed development of methodological standards of ageing research across Europe and the world over.

Let us now turn to the current issue 1 of volume 7. Two of the articles seem to be immediate responses to the points that we concluded need more attention: they are from authors in South Europe (Bilotta et al. 2010; Sousa et al. 2010). One of these is based on qualitative methods and is moreover innovative in that it addresses a common issue of life which has received very little attention from researchers so far: the inheritance process (Sousa et al. 2010). In the other two articles, we recognise the predominance of contributions from Western Europe: one is from Germany, reporting on the highly relevant issue of socioeconomic differences in health (Schöllgen et al. 2010) and the other, a review paper, from the Netherlands addressing another highly relevant issue: prevention of disability in frail older persons (Daniels et al. 2010). This

collection of articles certainly represents a good start of the new decennium for the EJA.

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